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The CIF: A vincentian Pilgrimage

The Spanish speaking participants

Vincentiana asks the Spanish-speaking participants of the CIF for a brief description of the experience. With great pleasure and eagerness we undertake this task. We think that we have been very privileged to have been the "*founders*" or "*pioneers*" in this great happening in the life of the Congregation of the Mission.

We share with the readers what we have lived and experienced during this three month pilgrimage. For us it has truly been a pilgrimage with all that this word implies; a road, a reflection, formation, prayer, camaraderie, accompaniment, strength and expansion.

The idea that brought the CIF to life comes from the Superior General and his council in accord with our Constitutions: "*Our formation should be continued and renewed during our whole lives.*" (CC. c.VI, n. 81). And the Last General Assembly inviting us to a "*Renovation of all our ministries and our communities as we seek an integral formation guided by the principle of following Christ the Evangelizer of the poor*".

1. Goals of our Pilgrimage

Our program had clear objectives and concrete goals. This is of utmost importance. Our journey was well-planned.

a. **Know each other and share experiences.** We were all of the same family but we did not know each other. Our first task was to get to know each other, establish a human community. In this way our group came to reflect the unity and universality that is the Congregation of the Mission.

b. **Deepen our knowledge of St. Vincent.** By visiting the places where he walked we were able to come to know him and to walk in his path.

c. Reflect upon our own lives and community experience in order to better our capacity as evangelizers.

2. There is no pilgrimage without pilgrims:

Thirty Vincentians from all over the world arrived at the motherhouse on Rue de Sèvres on Sept. 4, 1995. We were a truly international community: six from Spain, five from the United States, three from India, two from Mexico, two from Central America, two from Puerto Rico, two from Brazil, two from Indonesia, one from the Philippines, one from Portugal, one from Peru, one from Colombia, one from Ireland, and one from Eritrea.

3. There is no pilgrimage without a plan and a method:

It is not possible to walk just any way one pleases. We did our pilgrimage with a special plan in mind. Of course it was difficult to get tuned in, but in time we caught on.

Our journey together was based on four basic cornerstones:

a. presentation of a theme

- This was usually done by an expert and the presentation was followed by questions.

b. personal reflection

- One of our criticisms was that there was not sufficient time for this reflection.

c. group work

- In this task we dialogued about the presentation and about the questions presented.

d. plenary session

- On Thursday and Friday our meeting place turned itself in a Parliament as the group began to report on their findings. Very often the creativity of the presentations was outstanding and the session were much anticipated.

(The next paragraph is not clear in the text. It contains some contradictions and I have opted for a concise summary. (The translator)

The pedagogy had its efficacy and its values, but also its deficiencies.

In general the methods used were very good, but more than anything the fraternal climate of the group must be underlined as a highlight.

As we said above there was not enough time for personal reflection. Also the different language groups caused a difficulty, but we survived by forming special language groups. Another obstacle was the lack of reference sources. For a group of thirty students the reference materials were not sufficient.

4. There is no pilgrimage without guides.

Every pilgrimage must have its guides and our guides were good ones: **Fr. Rybolt, Fr. Renouard, and Fr. Sterling**

Many others supported us with their orientation, company, and materials.

Father Jose Maria Roman: He put us up to date about Vincentian studies and gave us hermeneutical keys to the understanding of St. Vincent.

Father Braga: He introduced us to the Constitutions. This had to be the way we would walk. His profound knowledge of the Constitutions made us enjoy the learning. We worked with the texts and we came to know the Constitutions and to love them.

Father Poole: He taught us about "apostolic activity". Beginning with Saint he showed us the development of this theme over the years and right to the present.

Father Maloney: He shared with us a day on our pilgrimage. He taught us with clarity and simplicity just what our mission is and who the missionary should be, how we should evangelize and he motivated us to accept the radical challenge that our vocation presents us today.

Mr. Cotinaud: This layman psychologist taught us about community life. He made astute observations about human relations and the difficulties and traps in good communication.

Father Rybolt: During the fifth week he taught us about community life from the time of Vincent until today. His presentation made us reflect whether our own community houses really are evangelizing communities.

Father Renouard: He taught us about the five characteristic virtues pointing out not only that these virtues have not lost their importance but that they are at the heart and should be of the spirituality of the Vincentian.

Father Catalan, S.J.: He taught us about the vows from the point of view of a psychologist/ psychiatrist. He delved into the area of childhood showing us how our childhood influences our adult lives.

Father Ubillus: He is the provincial of Peru. He taught us about the vows and how they are to be lived in different cultures. Despite the differences from country to country he showed us the challenge and efficacy of the vows in the task of evangelization.

Father Lautissier: He is the director of the Daughters in France. He taught about the identity of the Daughter of Charity and her relationship with the person of the Superior General.

Sister Elizabeth Charpy: She is a D.C. She taught about the spiritual journey of Louis and her participation in the founding of the C.M.

Father Sterling: His presentation was about the Sacrament of Penance. Also he taught us about the richness and importance of the Divine Office. Also he tried to make us aware of the wonderful treasures contained in popular religiosity.

Father Renoard: In his second presentation he spoke about Marian devotion in the spirituality of Vincent and Louise. He showed the importance of the Miraculous Medal and how Marian devotion must be an important part of our spiritual lives.

Sister Juana Elizondo: She is the Superior General of the Daughters of Charity. She informed us about the recent Synod in Rome where she had been invited. She spoke to us about the fraternal, spontaneous and respectful climate that encouraged freedom of expression.

Father Koch: His theme was prayer and he taught for the last two weeks of the course. His teaching was enriched by a Vincentian flavor and he awakened in us a desire to discover new forms of prayer and to share our prayer communally.

5. Pilgrimage to Vincentian Sites:

Our time of study would not have been complete without a visit to the places where Vincent walked. As we visited we were able to walk in the footsteps of Vincent.

We walked in his steps and saw the places that gave birth to the Congregation: FOLLEVILLE, CHATILLON, CHATEAU L'EVEQUE, DAX, TOLOUSE, BUZET, ETC.

These visits helped us to come to know even more our founder.

6. Pilgrimage to our interior:

Our journey brought us to the heart of our souls where we had the meeting between us and our God.

Our time at the Berceau was highlighted by four days of retreat directed by Fr. McCullen. He based the retreat on the vows and it culminated in the renewal of vows by all the participants.

7. Pilgrimage that should continue:

During our last week we had an evaluation of the experience. In this reflection the great question was: "*Are our apostolates and our community life really Vincentian?*"

The answers were rich and varied, and we finished with a great desire to continue developing the way that the course had indicated.

Our course is open-ended. It will be difficult to forget what this experience has meant.

The poet Antonio Machado has said: "*Traveler, there is no road; one makes the road while walking.*"

We agree, but we also know that the CIF experience has made us who we will be in the future.

We close with this prayer:

THAT YOUR ROAD MAY WIDEN AS YOU ADVANCE;
THAT THE SUN MAY ALWAYS SHINE ON YOU;
THAT THE SUN MAY BE ALWAYS AT YOUR BACK AND THAT THE RAIN
MAY FALL GENTLY ON YOUR FIELDS, AND THAT UNTIL OUR NEXT
MEETING MAY GOD GUARD YOU AND KEEP YOU IN THE PALM OF HIS
HAND. AMEN.

(Translated by Kevin Lawlor)